

Friday's Feature
By
Theresa Friday
September 17, 2005

Conserve fuel in your own backyard

With gas prices increasing and shortages in some areas, consumers have been asked to conserve fuel and be prudent in their use of energy. There have been many tips on how to reduce fuel consumption in your car, but did you know there are a number of practical ways to reduce the use of gasoline in your own backyard?

On average, it takes one gallon of gasoline to mow an acre of lawn. There are approximately 5 million acres of home lawns in the state of Florida. Mowing each of these lawns twenty times per year would result in the use of 100 million gallons of gas per year.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent in Okaloosa County, provides the following information on how to conserve gas in your own backyard.

Be smart as to where you grow grass. Use grass where it serves a purpose. You may not need a thick stand of grass in every square foot of your landscape. And concentrate your efforts in growing grass, where it wants to grow. For example, our lawn grasses are not very tree tolerant. It's normal for a lawn to decline in close proximity to large trees or groupings of trees. As an older lawn succumbs to tree competition, do something else in that area. Mulch the area under the tree, plant a shade tolerant groundcover or other shade tolerant plants that do well under trees.

Where you do grow grass, fertilize smart. Lawns need fertilizer. But too much fertilizer, particularly too much nitrogen, results in excessive grass growth. This excessive growth requires more time, money and gasoline to mow.

Most homeowners overdo it with too much nitrogen and too little potassium. Fertilizers with the correct ratios of nitrogen and potassium will produce the right balance of shoot growth as compared to root growth. Choose a fertilizer with at least fifty percent of the nitrogen in a slow release form. Fertilize to produce adequate growth and the correct color. If your lawn is a healthy green and you're mowing, mowing, mowing, why add more fertilizer?

Never apply more than the recommended amount of fertilizer per application. But you can always split the total amount into two or more applications, which will produce more even growth and minimize sudden growth spurts.

Many people choose to overseed their lawns with ryegrass during fall. But weigh the desire to have a green lawn through the winter with the extra time and costs (gas, fertilizer, water, pesticides, etc.) involved with maintaining it.

Finally, keep your gas powered lawn and landscape equipment in good working condition. It can make a difference in how efficiently the equipment operates. Make sure the equipment is clean. Change the oil, if needed. Replace or clean the air filter and spark plug. Keep lawnmower blades sharp. Basically, follow the owner's manual for routine maintenance.

Implementing these ideas will help conserve fuel and result in a healthier lawn as well.

Tip of the Week: Hummingbirds are very active right now. To enjoy these little birds put out an artificial feeder. However, feeders should not be the sole source of food provided. The sugar solution may appeal to the hummingbirds' sweet tooth, but it provides little nourishment. Nectar is much more than just water and sugar.

Packages of instant nectar may be found at many lawn and garden stores. You also can prepare your own solution with 1 part white, granulated, cane sugar to 4 parts water. Boil the sugar solution to help dissolve the sugar. Then allow it to cool before filling a feeder. Using a sweeter solution, sugar substitutes or honey could be lethal to hummers. It also is not necessary to add red food coloring. The birds will be attracted to the red feeders.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names in this article is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.